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MINISTERS

THE

CAUSE OF THE MISERIES

AND

DISAFFECTION OF THE PEOPLE,

ADDRESSED

TO THE

BRITISH NATION.

BY HAMPDEN.

*These Thoughts occurred to the Author on reading the Reply of the
People of Sheffield, to the London Corresponding Society.*

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MINISTERS

THE CAUSE of the MISERIES AND DISAFFECTION of the PEOPLE.

A NATION is good or bad as the government makes it, the moral character of a people and their political conduct is formed and regulated by the government; when the government is wicked and weak the people are profligate and wretched, when it is wise and virtuous, the people are prosperous and happy. Let us take a candid and dispassionate survey of the measures of the present administration and judge whether we derive from it the evils which have overwhelmed us.

Under the prevailing laws, if a man is reduced to indigence by the exactions of the state, and steals to support himself, he suffers an ignominious death; if he animadverts on the conduct of his governors he is transported to Botany-Bay, or doomed to the milder punishment of a four years imprisonment. But we have seen a prodigal lord commit every vice with impunity; pillage, and defraud his creditors, pretend patriotism, disseminate republican doctrines, alarm the government, obtain a profitable station, and become an instant enemy of his former principles. We have seen a lord indicted for a fraud, prosecuted for cheating at cards, convicted of every political and moral crime, a pauper and a felon, yet suddenly adopted by government, obtain a pension, promised a seat, as one of the sixteen peers of Scotland, for pledging himself to invariably vote with administration.

We have seen a young man with graceful classic speeches constantly harass the house for a parliamentary reform, menace the government with destruction if it were obstinate, and when he obtained the seat at its helm, enforce illegal and sanguinary measures against those who trod in his footsteps and copied his language.

~~Gerald was immured in Newgate, emaciated by long imprisonment, murdered by a cruel voyage, for promulgating principles for which the Duke of Portland was covered with paltry honors, and enriched by double and triple sinecures.~~

Moral prostitution keeps pace with political apostacy, and from the injustice of the cabinet emanates the universal mal-administration of the laws. A wretched prostitute is pillored in Pall-Mall for keeping a disorderly house, while the lady of of a Faro table is laughing at her shame from that very room where nocturnal revels, fleecing of dupes, seduction and licentiousness has done more mischief than the whole sisterhood of harlots.

If a tradesman's wife commits infidelity, she is driven from society, isolated and lost.—A dutchess lives in open prostitution, the husband knows it, and is contented, her associates talk of abandoning her, but she gives routes, balls and suppers, and her infamy is forgotten in the wines of her feasts.—A girl the mongrel offspring of a duke, of a facetious member of parliament, and of an Italian *gentildonna*, is deemed unworthy the company of our supercilious ladies, because of her illegitimacy; but a contemptible lord for a 100,000*l.* which the duke offers with her, vouchsafes to take her hand, and the mongrel girl's door is instantly darkened by coroneted carriages—the lord's name operates like magic, it seems to create a moral and a physical change, it is a transmutation from vice to virtue, for there is no other standard of vice and virtue among our nobles but grandeur and indigence.

Mark the tenor of our laws, observe the prevalence of our fashions, it is one invariable system that pervades the whole kingdom; to support the dignity, the power and the riches of the great; to abase, restrain and oppress the poor.

Our aristocracy is like our laws, a circle into which none but rich and great can enter:—lords and ladies and rich men form a distinct association, and every other class is proscribed their company:—none is admissible among the great but nobles, none can obtain law but the rich. What a mockery is it to boast of access to our laws till they are rendered cheaper, or the condition of our poor bettered?

A nation struggling for its liberties, was opposed by the nation who professed to be its champion, not a war for territory for riches, or even the phantom honor, but a war to destroy opinion, to restrain principles, to check the progress of reason; and pursued with an eagerness and inveteracy proportioned to its folly and difficulty—but what are the outcries of the people, what the universal suffrage against the war, what are petitions and remonstrances, while those who excited the war, those employed in it, and those in power and affluence feel no distress? Let the people suffer! Kings and great men are too remote to see the effects of poverty, too callous to regard the agonies of a distressed wife, or of an orphan pining for bread.

A bank established by merchants for commercial accommodation—conducted for ages with such caution and success as to be famous and renowned beyond all other depositaries of the world, is at last usurped by the government, identified with its ministry, drained by its secret exactions, and by a stretch of arbitrary power violent and unjust beyond all precedent, openly robbed of all its remaining specie:—thus is the country disgraced by a national bankruptcy, not from the profligacy and dissipation of the people, not from their riot and pillage, but by the disastrous and wicked conduct of their peculating governors—by what right, what title, what law (and God knows laws are soon framed for whatever purpose government want them) was this money seized and paper substituted for it? The people deposited the money, the bank is the people's, the trade is the people's, and government has as much right to ransack any private man's house, as it had to ravage the bank.

Taxes are never to be raised but to support the government, every guinea raised beyond what is necessary for its support, is a robbery on the people; to what an enormous extent has this robbery been lately committed?

Moderate taxes are a stimulus to industry, when they are immoderate they destroy it:—By taxes a government can shift the property from the hands they dislike, into the hands they like;—thus the people whom it hates are impoverished, and its minions enriched, it depresses the bold and industrious, and enriches its favourites and partizans, for in proportion as one class of people is reduced and subdued, another must be bribed

bribed and raised to aid the oppressors, or they cannot preserve their unjust dominion:—by this system of corruption which in an opulent country is almost inexhaustible, the aristocracy is stronger in England than in any kingdom in Europe; for it can bear more taxes than any other country; every tax creates new dependants, every imposition new officers, so that in every district, and in almost every family there is an enemy: some petty officer, some excisemen, some placemen, some wretch who fosters on the distresses of his countrymen, who deems it his interest to keep things as they are: this invention was the internal scheme of the minister who presides, to create an enemy and a spy in every house; this man, (whose predecessors, infamous as they were, seem like saints when held in comparison with him,) has refined on ancient despotism, and with bold and audacious measures, conducted secret and concealed machinations that form a basis for his superstructures.

The people labour to death, and those who live idle enjoy the fruits of their industry. The laws are not equal; this spirit manifests itself in every act, they are constructed by the rich to favor the rich, and to keep down the poor;—imprisonment, death, and all the penal code is levelled at the poor, there is no law to affect the rich, to maintain the democratic part of the government; the people are treated as a distinct order of beings, inferior to the great and rich of the country. If the parliament was the people's parliament as was originally intended by the Witenagemots; instead of the minister's parliament, the laws would be different; but hitherto they have been the minister's parliament, and not the people's; this is the deceit we wish to detect, this is the great abuse we wish to remedy, and until the people get proper representatives, which can only be obtained by universal suffrage; we do not strike the evil at its source; we lop off ramifications, but the root continues.—Even the minister's partizans are forced to admit that there are great abuses; how came those abuses? Who are guilty of them? It must be the government that introduced them, it could not, be the people, for alas! they have no power to innovate; it is allowed in their fastidious language that bad ministers have been guilty of abuses. How then is it said that the people attack the government when we wish to redress the abuses? so may it be as justly said that the physician is the disorder;—the truth is, that the government has violated the constitution, and the

the people would defend it; the constitution is not the government, they are distinct and at enmity.

While we are thus insulted and outraged, who is to preach up order and unanimity? Yes, we will preserve order and be unanimous; but our order and unanimity shall point to the radical redress of our grievances, not to a change of men who shall begin their ministry by a few popular laws, to delude and silence us; but to a change of measures; a total change of an audacious and wicked system, that has occasioned such embarrassments and confusion, and has reduced the country to a condition which surprises even those who have been the cause of it. This is the picture of our government, this deformed hideous figure, is what was once deemed the most beautiful structure that was ever raised by human wisdom;—but now so transformed and distorted as to bear no semblance of what it was.

The people are not riotous and tumultuary, they are supine, patient and forbearing; but the government is forming conspiracies and every where arming its dependents against them—The people too must arm in their turn, if they do not mean to lay down quietly and have their throats cut;—they should arm against foreign enemies and domestic treachery; they should know each other by a badge, that in the moment of danger they may instantly unite and avert it;—Government has just instituted committees in all the Parishes to select and arm its creatures, if the other part of the community does not directly arm itself they will be butchered, and the country lost, without a struggle,

HAMPDEN.





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